

BRIEFLY

249 Chinese held in HK: Police arrested 249 mainland Chinese in a 24-hour sweep against illegal immigrants in Hong Kong that ended Wednesday morning, AP says from Hong Kong.

Seven Hong Kong Chinese were also arrested for aiding or employing the immigrants, a statement said. Although it returned to Chinese sovereignty July 1, Hong Kong maintains its own immigration controls and does not entitle Chinese citizens to automatic entry.

Pak road mishap kills 11: An unregistered truck carrying heavy construction equipment smashed into a bus in Pakistan, killing 11 people and injuring eight, an English-language newspaper reported Wednesday. AP says from Islamabad.

Five people died instantly in the crash Tuesday in Rawalpindi, next to the federal capital, Islamabad, the news reported. Rescue workers, who had to cut the injured passengers out of the crumpled wreckage of the bus, said six more died at local hospitals. The eight other injured were reported to be in stable condition.

WW-II bomb found in Germany: The discovery of an unexploded World War II bomb caused the evacuation of German MPs from their Bonn parliamentary offices on Tuesday, officials said. AFP reports from Bonn.

The 500 kilogramme (1,100 pound) device, still a common find in Germany 52 years after sustained allied bombing raids, was found on a worksite next to the MPs office tower on the Rhine River.

Heavy rains claim 25 in India: About 25 people have lost their lives in the heavy rains in the past three weeks in Tamil Nadu under the influence of the north-east monsoon, according to official sources. PTI says from Chennai.

The sources said the deaths were due to well collapses, electrocution and flash floods. In the past two days alone torrential rains in southern parts of the state had claimed nearly a dozen lives, the sources said.

Sharmila Tagore gets French awards: Popular Indian film actress Sharmila Tagore bagged two awards for her performance in Merchant Ivory Production's 'Gaachi' (the tree) at the prestigious International Rencontre Film Festival at the Videotique De Paris, PTI reports from Mumbai.

Sylvie Perras representative of the French ministry of culture presented the 'La Medaille De La Ville De Paris' and the 'Chevalier Des Paris Et Des Lettres' to the actress at the award ceremony on October 18, a message received here said. 'Gaachi', directed by Catherine Berge, is based on the life and art of renowned Bengali actor Soumitra Chatterjee.

6 killed in Chinese train crash: A speeding passenger train slammed into a truck at a crossing near the southern Chinese City of Guangzhou, killing the engineer, the truck driver and four other people, a newspaper reported, AP reports from Beijing.

The 16-car train bound for Beijing had just left Guangzhou station when it hit the truck at a crossing shortly after midnight Tuesday morning, the Yangcheng Wanbao reported. Three other people were seriously injured and many others received less severe injuries, the newspaper said.

Thai FM begins Myanmar visit: Thai Foreign Minister Prachuab Chaiyasarn began a two-day visit to Myanmar yesterday seeking to improve bilateral relations, ministry officials said, Reuters reports from Bangkok.

An official said there was no fixed agenda for the visit by Prachuab, who heads a 16-member delegation including businessmen and officials. The discussions will focus on strengthening bilateral relations, a foreign ministry spokesman said.

Cambodia to set up ties with ROK: Cambodia will soon establish full diplomatic relations with South Korea after King Norodom Sihanouk dropped his long-time opposition to formal ties, a senior government official said yesterday, Reuters reports from Phnom Penh.

Prak Sokhonn, a top aide to second prime minister Hun Sen, said ambassador-level relations could be established as soon as next week if Seoul agreed.

Prince Charles' SA tour begins: Prince Charles and his son Prince Harry flew to South Africa Tuesday night for an official visit, a safari and a meeting with the Spice Girls, AP says from London.

It was their first trip since the Aug. 31 death of the young prince's mother, Princess Diana, in a Paris car crash. Harry, 13, and his brother, Prince William, 15, returned to school about two weeks after their mother's death. William was unable to go to South Africa because his school break will end too soon. Harry will attend two public engagements with his father in South Africa — a Spice Girls charity concert at Johannesburg Stadium on Nov. 1 and a Nov. 3 visit to the Kwazulu village of Duku Duku.

Catholic priest killed in India: A Catholic priest working for an Australian mission was found beheaded in a forest in northern India, apparently a victim of the region's brutal Hindu caste wars, colleagues said Wednesday, AP reports from New Delhi.

The decapitated body of the Rev Father AT Thomas, 46, was found Monday in a river bed near Sirika village, about 30 km from Hazaribagh in the state of Bihar where the mission was based. Colleagues in Australia linked the murder to Thomas's help to a group of untouchables in a land dispute with upper caste Hindus.

Sierra Leone curfew lifted: The military junta lifted a 3-month-old curfew and reopened an important highway Tuesday, a sign of easing tensions following the announcement of a plan to return the country to civilian rule, AP reports from Freetown.

State-run radio announced the changes Tuesday evening without elaborating on the reasons, but the decisions follow last week's agreement by the military junta to step down by April 1998 and hand power back to President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah. Kabbah was driven from office in May in a bloody coup led by Army Maj. Johnny Paul Koroma. West African peace-keeping troops led by Nigerian soldiers had fought since then to reverse the coup.

Britain's fresh offer to resolve Kashmir dispute

LONDON, Oct 29: Foreign Secretary Robin Cook on Tuesday reaffirmed Britain's willingness to help resolve the long standing conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, reports AFP.

He said it was an area of legitimate interest to Britain because both countries had nuclear potential.

A similar offer Cook reportedly made while in Pakistan accompanying Queen Elizabeth on her visit earlier this month infuriated New Delhi and caused a series of uncomfortable diplomatic incidents when she went on to India.

Cook was accused of interfering in India's affairs.

He told parliament Tuesday that he had discussed Kashmir with senior political figures in both Pakistan and India and said "Britain continues to be willing to help, but any offer of help must be acceptable to both countries."

DPRK food crisis likely to grow worse next yr

BEIJING, Oct 29: North Korea's food crisis is likely to grow worse next year, a UN official said on Tuesday, but he denied reports of cannibalism in the country, reports Reuters.

The worst has not even started, Christian Lemaire, resident representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in North Korea, said in an interview.

Food shortages, caused by a drought and tidal waves that have wiped out much of this year's harvest, were expected to hit the nation next March when domestically produced rice and maize run out, he said.

But Lemaire dismissed newspaper reports that people in the country side had resorted to cannibalism.

They certainly do not eat human flesh, he said.

"For the moment the situation is a little better because it is harvest time," he said.

Raid on illegal workers in Malaysia: 109 held

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 29: Thirty-eight Japanese were among 109 foreigners detained in a raid on illegal workers in Malacca, it was reported Wednesday, reports AP.

This is the first time such a large number of Japanese were hauled up in a single operation, Malacca state immigration Director Che Mamat Abdullah was quoted as saying by the Straits Times.

In Tuesday's raid two Dutchmen, some Indonesians and others were also detained.

The Japanese only had tourist visas but were found working on the multi-billion dollar National Oil Corporation oil refinery project in Malacca.

About 200 army personnel, 14 police officers and 10 immigration officers participated in the operation.

The detained workers could face deportation.

Arms shipment to Bosnia blocked

SARAJEVO, Oct 29: The NATO-led peace force said on Tuesday it had blocked the delivery of a US arms shipment destined for the Bosnian Federation army until authorities meet peacetime arms control limits, reports Reuters.

A NATO spokesman said Bosnia's Muslim-Croat Federation had exceeded arms control limits on heavy weapons and would not be allowed to receive the arms shipment of 126 Howitzers until it complied with those limits.

"Before we let weapons in, we want to make sure that they do not put the federation over the ceilings," Major Chris Riley, spokesman for the stabilisation force (SFOR), told Reuters.

"The movement of any weapons into this country must be controlled and authorised by SFOR," Riley said.

Charity album in memory of Diana

LONDON, Oct 29: Former Beatle Sir Paul McCartney, US rocker Bruce Springsteen and opera star Luciano Pavarotti are among 35 major artists who have agreed to contribute songs to a charity double album in memory of Princess Diana, her lawyers said Tuesday, reports AP.

The final list of singers on the 'Diana, Princess of Wales - Tribute' album, which will go on sale Dec. 1, reads like a Who's Who from the rock, pop and classical music worlds.

Many of the 36 songs are evocative ballads — Queen's 'Who Wants to Live Forever', Annie Lennox's 'Angel', REM's 'Everybody Hurts', Seal's 'Prayer For The Dying'.

There also are songs by Michael Jackson, George Michael, U2, Eric Clapton, Rod Stewart, Sinéad O'Connor, Peter Dinklage, Enya, Barbara Streisand, Aretha Franklin, Celine Dion, Mariah Carey, Toni Braxton, Gloria Estefan and classical singers Placido Domingo and Lesley Garrett.

Proceeds from the album will go to the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund set up after the princess' Aug. 31 death in a Paris car crash, said Kate Knightly Day, a spokeswoman for Diana's lawyers, Mishcon de Reya.



Chinese President Jiang Zemin talks with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright after his arrival at the Blair House in Washington Tuesday. — AP/UNB photo

Tussle with PM over appointment of 5 judges

Pak opposition parties support Chief Justice

ISLAMABAD, Oct 29: Pakistani opposition parties threw their support behind the country's Chief Justice on Tuesday in his tussle with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif whom they accused of seeking a one-party dictatorship, reports Reuters.

A declaration issued after a meeting of representatives of about 20 parties in Islamabad accused Sharif's eight-month-old government of taking an "antagonistic attitude towards the judiciary" and making parliament a rubber-stamp forum.

The so-called all parties conference, which included opposition leader Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP), was convened hours after Sharif returned home early from the Commonwealth Summit before a National Assembly (Lower House) session called for today to discuss the issue.

The dispute, which has gripped the nation's attention for weeks, centres on Sharif's reluctance to appoint five new judges to the Supreme Court recommended by Chief Justice Sajjad Ali Shah in August to fill as many vacancies to complete the court's sanctioned strength of 17 judges.

Shah insists his nominees must be appointed or the government give grounds for non-compliance, in which case the court will rule over these grounds.

Opposition parties see today's assembly session as a move to subvert a prevailing judicial activism by passing a law to reduce the strength of the Supreme Court to make Shah's nominations redundant.

Their declaration said the government, which enjoys an overwhelming majority in the parliament, was "hell-bent on establishing one-party dictatorship in the country and in the process is destroying all established democratic and constitutional institutions."

AP adds: Amid a fierce power struggle between Pakistan's judiciary and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, the Supreme Court on Wednesday suspended sections of a constitutional amendment that forced legislators to vote along party lines.

Passed in July, the amendment was aimed at putting an end to the decades-old tradition of vote-buying to get legislation through the lawmaking National Assembly, the lower house of Parliament.

A three-judge panel led by Supreme Court Chief Justice Sajjad Ali Shah suspended sections of the amendment which gave party leaders the right to suspend legislators who did not vote along party lines. Shah said the passages prevented members from voting according to their conscience.

The ruling comes the same

day the National Assembly is to take up the controversial issue of whether the prime minister or the chief justice has the right to appoint Supreme Court judges.

In what analysts are calling the worst political crisis to face Sharif since he won a landslide election in February, the prime minister has locked horns over the issue with Shah who in August put forward a motion to expand his 12-seat court by five judges.

Sharif has refused to approve the motion, saying he has the right to reject suggested appointments. Shah says Sharif has violated a March 1996 Supreme Court ruling which requires the executive branch to give approval for Supreme Court appointments within 30 days.

Wednesday's ruling means that members of Sharif's ruling Pakistan Muslim League could vote against him in the Wednesday evening session of parliament and force him to approve Shah's appointments.

"No action should be taken against members who vote against their party's decision today or afterwards," Shah said in his ruling.

Opposition parties led by former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party have already pledged to support the judiciary if a vote is held on the issue.

Congress yet to decide on joining new Gujarat govt

NEW DELHI, Oct 29: The Congress yesterday said the issue of party's participation in the new BJP government in Gujarat was "still open" and a decision on this would be taken after discussions with state party leaders and AICC observers, reports PTI.

Party assistant spokesman Ajit Jogi told reporters here the Congress and the Rashtriya Janata Party had decided to set up a steering committee to co-ordinate between the two parties for smooth functioning of the government.

The committee would perform functions of the government in three areas: lay down policy guidelines, discuss and decide important administrative issues and ensure implementation of policies and programmes of the Congress as per the party manifesto.

Gujarat PCC president CD Patel and CLP leader Amarsingh Chaudhary would represent the Congress on the committee to begin with.

Replying to a question, Jogi said it was yet to be decided as to who would preside over the committee.

Asked what the Congress had

achieved by replacing Vaghela with another BJP leader, he defended the new arrangement saying "qualitatively there has been a world of difference."

Another report adds: Defence Minister and Samajwadi Party (SP) president Mulayam Singh Yadav, yesterday ruled out the possibility of his party pulling out of the United Front.

"My party will not sever relation with the United Front as it wants to strengthen the secular forces in the country," Yadav told reporters in Patna.

He, however, said he would raise his party's view on the Uttar Pradesh issue at the UF meeting today.

Yadav was replying to queries of mediators on recent developments in Uttar Pradesh and subsequent reversal of the United Front government's decision on imposing president's rule in the state before returning to New Delhi after his one-day tour of Bihar.

He also ruled out the possibility of his party entering into an alliance with Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Uttar Pradesh in the near future.

There is no question of my

party having an understanding with BSP. It is a party which cannot be trusted," the SP president said.

Asked whether his party would forge an alliance with Congress, Yadav said, "There has been on talks between us in this connection so far."

Meanwhile, the United Front convenor and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu yesterday favoured presidential form of government in the country as "the present system was leading to political instability and horse-trading."

Addressing an extended meeting of Telugu Desam executives in Hyderabad, Naidu called for a thorough national debate on the issue.

"There would be no scope for defections and splits in the presidential system," he said.

Lambasting Congress and BJP for "engineering defections in other parties to further their political ends," Naidu said such unscrupulous methods were weakening the democracy.

Referring to Article 356, the TDP president said his party was opposed to invoking it to dismiss state governments.

Albright presses Israel to start ME peace talks

WASHINGTON, Oct 29: Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on Tuesday turned up the pressure on Israel to start peace talks with the Palestinians, telling Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu she needed a decision quickly, reports Reuters.

Albright, impatient at apparent foot-dragging by the Jewish state, said she had telephoned Netanyahu on Tuesday morning "about the necessity of moving this process forward."

"We are still pushing to have these meetings take place. Time is kind of piling up here. It seems to be dragging on rather more than I would have liked," she told reporters.

It was the second day running that the State Department had shown frustration that divisions between Netanyahu and Foreign Minister David Levy were holding up the talks, which had been expected to begin in the United States this week.

Levy said in Jerusalem on Sunday that he had delayed his

departure to get a clear mandate from this government. Israel's cabinet was due to discuss the issue today.

Israeli officials in Washington said they expected today's meeting to decide their country's line at the talks.

"What's the point of sending people here before the decision? This will be a waste of time," he said.

But Albright said: "Time is really not on the side of those who want to see results. We have a limited window, and we hope very much that we can use the time in an appropriate way."

"We would like to have the people here and have them have some authority to make decisions," she said. "We need to keep this on a fairly concise timetable."

The talks, due to be held in or near Washington between Levy and Palestinian negotiator Mahmoud Abbas, were arranged a month ago by Albright, who will act as host of the meeting.

Off the Record

Unusual tranquilliser

BANGKOK: A Thai woman has accused a doctor of using unusual means to quieten her during childbirth — several punches to the face, reports Reuters.

Police said Tuesday that Boonthong Youthica, 28, from northeastern Thailand, charged that her doctor had punched her in the face to stop her from screaming while she was in labour.

She said the doctor who attended her during the Sunday birth of her child ordered her to stop screaming, then hit her in the face, said police in Sisaket province, about 500 km north-east of Bangkok.

A police officer said Boonthong's face was bruised from being struck and that they would arrest the doctor, who faces one month in jail or a 2,000-baht (\$1 dollar) fine if he is convicted.

Americans would rather make love...

MIAMI: Sex beats riding the space shuttle or being president for a day, but half of all Americans would rather go on a free shopping spree, a survey published Tuesday showed, reports Reuters.

Americans love to make love — they are edged out only by the French in the 14-nation survey. But when asked to choose between sex and an unlimited shopping spree on someone else's gold credit card, 57 per cent of American women found the latter option more appealing.

For men it was 42 per cent, giving a full 50 per cent across the sexes who would rather be shopping, the survey said.

British-owned condom manufacturer Durex asked 1,055 US men and women aged over 18 to talk about sex-related issues as part of a survey of almost 10,000 people in 14 countries.

The US part of the survey found that more than half of Americans would rather make love than be a guest on the next space shuttle, and 50 per cent would rather make love than be president of the United States for a day.

Voting from space!

SPACE CENTRE, Houston: For the first time in history, an American astronaut is about to exercise his right to vote while in orbit, reports AP.

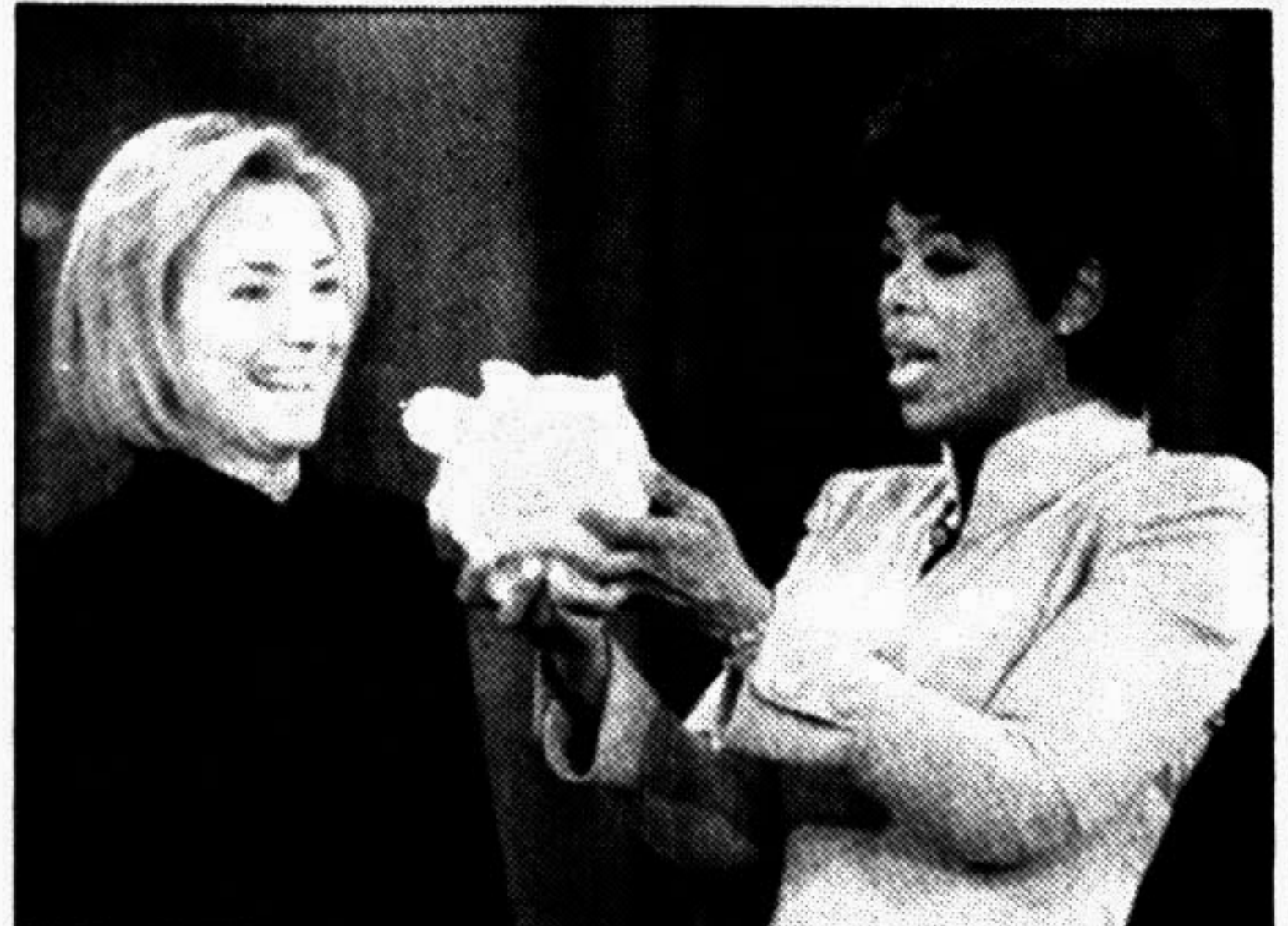
A ballot has been sent to David Wolf aboard the Russian space station Mir, thanks to a new Texas law. It was prompted by John Blaha's inability to vote from Mir last year.

Under the old law, an absentee ballot had to be sent by US mail. But in June, Gov. George W Bush signed a bill saying astronauts registered to vote in Texas — where most of them live — can cast ballots from space.

Using new software developed by NASA, Tony J. Sirvello III, Harris County's elections chief, sent a ballot last week to US flight controller in Moscow, and they transmitted it to Wolf 240 miles above Earth.

The 41-year-old doctor and engineer, who arrived on the station in September for a four-month stay, will open the e-mail on a laptop computer. He has until 7 pm Houston local time on Nov. 4, (0100 GMT Nov. 5) Election Day, to get the ballot back to Sirvello via the flight controllers in Russia.

Sirvello will read Wolf's e-mail and punch a ballot by hand with the astronaut's choices.



First lady Hillary Clinton presents Oprah Winfrey with a piggy-bank full of change from the White House for Oprah's Angel Network during a live broadcast Tuesday in Chicago. Oprah's Angel Network, which includes the donation of spare change from viewers, will send one child from each state to college. — AP/UNB photo

Issues on the Sino-US summit agenda

WASHINGTON, Oct 29: Issues on the table for likely action in meetings between US and Chinese leaders this week with the state visit of Chinese President Jiang Zemin:

NUCLEAR — Implement the 1985 US-China Nuclear Cooperation Agreement, with President Clinton certifying to Congress that China is no longer selling or transferring nuclear technology to other countries for weapons development, particularly Iran and Pakistan. This would allow the US nuclear industry to export multi-billion dollar reactors and technology to China, reports AP.

TRADE — The Chinese are expected to sign a deal — possibly at the summit — to buy 30 Boeing aircraft worth about \$2 billion, to assuage US concerns about the growing trade deficit, expected to reach \$44 billion this year.

HOT LINE — Establish a direct communications link between the presidents, a symbolic gesture.

HUMAN RIGHTS — China may agree to open a "dialogue" on human rights, the biggest area of disagreement between the two nations.

LOANS — Possible reactivation of US-backed loans for American companies doing business in China. Sanctions after Tiananmen Square cut off such loans.

RULE OF LAW — Increase US support of China's developing legal system, including training lawyers, prosecutors and judges.

DRUGS — Step up anti-drug,

anti-crime cooperation, possibly by allowing the United States to open a Drug Enforcement Agency office in Beijing.

ENVIRONMENT — Enhance anti-pollution programmes for more clean coal technology and expand electricity to rural areas in China.

SPACE — Broaden research cooperation in space technology.

EDUCATION — Expand Fulbright scholarship programme for China study.

Up for discussion, but no action expected:

TIANANMEN SANCTIONS — China wants the United States to lift the ban on the sale of weapons or defence technologies to the Chinese military.

EXPORTS — Beijing wants lifted US restrictions on export to China of dual-use technologies — fast computers, chemicals, communications devices and other civilian materials that can be used for military purposes.

HUMAN RIGHTS — The Clinton administration wants China to release political dissidents. The Chinese maintain they're criminals but have hinted they may grant medical pardons for ill inmates, China

consistently insists human rights and its political and government system are internal affairs.

TRADE — China wants to join the World Trade Organisation, but US officials say the Chinese must first lower trade barriers. A deadline for negotiations could be set to spur talks.

China also wants permanent most-favoured-nation status, which now must be approved annually to maintain normal trade.

TAIWAN ARMS SALES — China wants a halt to US sales and transfers of weapons to Taiwan, something the US side finds unacceptable. The Americans want Beijing and Taipei to restart talks to reach a peaceful settlement on Taiwan's future.

DETARGETING — China wants a "no first use" nuclear weapons agreement with the United States. US policy forbids giving up the first-use nuclear rights, although the administration is discussing symbolic detargeting.

MISSILES — The United States is pressuring China to adhere to arms-control agreements and halt transfers of ballistic and cruise missiles to Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Libya,

North Korea and others.

TIBET — China objects to the Clinton administration's plan to appoint a US coordinator to Tibet, possibly as soon as Saturday, to urge autonomy talks between Beijing and the Dalai Lama, Tibet's exiled spiritual leader.

HONG KONG — The United States is complaining about rollbacks in electoral rights, which the administrative government has started to impose since the July 1 return of the British colony to Chinese rule.

NORTH KOREA — China and the United States are hoping to move forward on stalled four-party peace talks on the Korean Peninsula, which were halted earlier this year by North Korea.

US-JAPAN — China is seeking American assurances that the updated US-Japan Defence Guidelines aren't aimed at Beijing. The guidelines allow Japanese support for US military operations in Asia.

ENVIRONMENT — The United States wants China to lower emissions to halt global warming, but like other developing nations Beijing may object to strict targets that could hurt struggling industry.



Italian NATO-led peacekeeping soldier wears a mask due to low temperature, while he stands guard in his "APC" at the Vrbanja bridge in downtown Sarajevo Tuesday. — AP/UNB photo